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## **PAVEL SURGES TO BREAKTHROUGH VICTORY IN 37<sup>TH</sup> RUNNING OF CHURCHILL DOWNS' GRADE I, \$500,000 STEPHEN FOSTER HANDICAP**

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Saturday, June 16, 2018)** – A team that has earned a pair of Kentucky Derby (Grade I) victories returned to Churchill Downs to win another of the historic track's major races when **Pavel** surged to the lead at the top of the stretch and rolled to a 3 ¾-length victory in Saturday night's 37<sup>th</sup> running of the \$500,000 Stephen Foster Handicap Presented by GE Appliances (GI) before a crowd of 21,053.

The 4-year-old son of Creative Cause scored the most important victory of his 10-race career for owner **Reddam Racing LLC**, trainer **Doug O'Neill** and jockey **Mario Gutierrez**, the team that earned Kentucky Derby victories at Churchill Downs in 2012 with **I'll Have Another** and **Nyquist** in 2016.

"We were very optimistic with him all along and to see him put it together was great," O'Neill said. "We went through a bit of a funky phase with him and had some traffic troubles in his last couple of races."

Pavel surged past the pace-setting **Uncle Mojo** and heavily-favored **Backyard Heaven** at the top of the stretch, quickly pulled clear and increased his advantage in the run to the finish. The winner returned \$15.80, \$7.80 and \$7.20 as the 6-1 third choice in the field of nine 3-year-olds and up. **Honorable Duty** edged late-running longshot **Matrooh** by a head for the runner-up spot under jockey **Corey Lanerie** and paid \$8 and \$7.20. Matrooh, the longest shot in the field at 68-1, returned \$26 to show under **Santo Sanjur**.

Favored **Backyard Heaven**, the 4-5 favorite following a string of three consecutive victories, faded to finish sixth, 10 ½ lengths behind the winner.

"It wasn't his day today," said Backyard Heaven's jockey **Irad Ortiz Jr.** "He just never really picked up things around there. He just didn't fire."

The victory in the Stephen Foster Handicap, a Breeders' Cup "Win and You're In Classic Division" race, earned Pavel a guaranteed spot in the starting gate for the \$6 million Breeders' Cup Classic (GI), which will also be run at the Louisville track on Saturday, Nov. 3. Starting fees and travel expenses will also be paid for the Southern California-based winner.

Pavel completed the 1 1/8-mile distance over a fast track in 1:49.21.

The victory snapped a string of six consecutive losses by Pavel that dated back to a victory in the Smarty Jones (GIII) at Parx Racing in December. He had finished fourth in each of three 2018 races, which included a trip to Dubai's Meydan Racecourse to compete in the \$10 million Dubai World Cup (GI). The Stephen Foster Handicap victory improved his career record to 10-3-0-1 as he became racing's latest millionaire when the \$297,600 winner's share of the purse improved Pavel's lifetime earnings to \$1,175,000.

"He got the perfect setup tonight," Gutierrez said. "He's been training really well into this race so I was confident he'd run well. When we turn for home I could feel like I had a lot of horse underneath me still. It was a great feeling and he won very easily under his own. I knew this horse could be better than his last couple of races and he had some bad luck. He overcame that tonight."

Uncle Mojo battled **Irish War Cry** for the early lead as Backyard Heaven and Pavel settled just behind the leaders. Honorable Duty, who hit the rail heading into the first turn, settled behind the top group as the pace-setting Uncle Mojo established early fractions of :24.35 for the opening quarter and a half-mile in :47.25. Pavel moved outside the leaders heading into the turn as Uncle Mojo continued to lead as Backyard Heaven moved up, while Irish War Cry dropped back suddenly on the turn. Gutierrez and Pavel launched a three-wide move for the lead at the head the stretch as the colt quickly surged past that pair in the upper stretch and drew clear. The winner steadily increased his advantage in the run through the stretch as Honorable Duty and Matrooh battled for the runner-up spot and **Hawaakom** made a late run to finish fourth.

After the top four, the order of finish in the Stephen Foster Handicap was completed by Uncle Mojo, Backyard Heaven, **Patch**, **Lookin At Lee** and Irish War Cry, who was pulled up in the homestretch and vanned off.

"I second guessed my decision (to run)," said Irish War Cry's trainer **Graham Motion**. "I thought it would cool off. When we shipped out here it was really hot and tonight it just didn't cool off at all."

### STEPHEN FOSTER HANDICAP QUOTES

**Mario Gutierrez, jockey of PAVEL (winner):** "He got the perfect setup tonight. He's been training really well into this race so I was confident he'd run well. When we turn for home I could feel like I had a lot of horse underneath me still. It was a great feeling and he won very easily under his own. I knew this horse could be better than his last couple of races and he had some bad luck. He overcame that tonight."

**Doug O'Neill, trainer of PAVEL (winner):** "I really have to thank the owners with this horse and my brother, Dennis, who helped us pick out this horse. In his last couple of races, he got really worked up in the paddock and didn't run to his best effort. We know he likes to travel and I have to thank our groom and exercise rider for coming out here early with him and getting acclimated to the track. I'm not sure what we'll do next with him. I see myself nudging up to some adult beverage tonight then thinking about where we go next. We were very optimistic with him all along and to see him put it together was great. We went through a bit of a funky phase with him and had some traffic troubles in his last couple of races."

**Corey Lanerie, jockey of HONORABLE DUTY (runner-up):** "We got a great trip and settled into a perfect position. The winner just simply drew away in the stretch."

**Brendan Walsh, trainer of HONORABLE DUTY (runner-up):** "It's a bummer running second again in this race but we'll get it one year. The winner ran a good race; we were just second best."

**Santo Sanjur, jockey of MATROOH (third):** "He ran big, stayed behind the speed. He ran really, really well."

**Brian Hernandez Jr., jockey of HAWAAKOM (fourth):** "That horse ran really well up front. We had a great trip but just couldn't close into that pace."

**Wes Hawley, jockey of HAWAAKOM (fourth):** "It's a little disappointing we were really close for second but I'm proud of his effort. He just couldn't catch that horse up front."

**Irad Ortiz Jr., jockey of BACKYARD HEAVEN (sixth):** "It wasn't his day today. He just never really picked up things around there. He just didn't fire."

**Ken Ramsey, owner of BACKYARD HEAVEN (sixth):** "I'm still leaving here with a smile on my face. It was a great night of racing but it just wasn't our day."

**Ricardo Santana Jr., jockey of LOOKIN AT LEE (eighth):** "He just couldn't close into the pace tonight. He needs a better setup."

**Graham Motion, trainer of IRISH WAR CRY (ninth):** "I second guessed my decision. I thought it would cool off. When we shipped out here it was really hot and tonight it just didn't cool off at all."

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